

Vermont Farmers' Markets

Annual Survey Report

2008

In 2008, there were 61 summer farmers' markets operating at least one day a week throughout the state of Vermont. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), with direction from the newly formed Vermont Farmers' Market Association mailed a survey to all the farmers' market managers or coordinators at the conclusion of the 2008 market season asking about sales, the status of their markets, and areas their markets needed assistance. This report highlights answers received from 48 markets (79%). Information received on the survey sheets varied from all questions answered with added comments to very little information.

Size and Venue

The number of individual vendors that attended a given market at least once last summer ranged from 2 to 101. The largest markets averaged between 40 and 50 vendors (8 reporting markets) each week. Ten averaged under 10 vendors, seventeen between 10 and 20 vendors, and 6 between 20 and 40 vendors. Most markets were made up of agricultural product vendors, processed and ready to eat foods and baked goods, and a variety of crafts. Some markets allow massage services. Vendors drove up to 75 miles to sell at markets. The average mileage driven was between 5 and 30 miles, the greater distances are by vendors driving to the larger and more profitable markets where there are a greater number of customers to buy their products.

Finances

In 2008, 35 of the 48 reporting markets collected gross receipt data of their vendors. These totals were (generally) divided into 3 major categories: agricultural sales, food sales, and crafts. The total reported gross sales amount is \$5,660,220. Agricultural products accounted for \$2,870,678 reported; Processed foods \$1,225,063; and Crafts and other services \$664,374. Some of the reporting markets did not break down their total sales into any categories, which accounts for the discrepancy of these subtotals not equaling the total amount reported. Only 5 markets reported Agricultural sales of less than 50% of their total (the lowest being 37%), 21 markets over 50% and of those markets, 12 had sales over 60% (the highest being 87%). Only 2 markets had craft (and other services) amounts over 20%. Processed foods and baked goods averaged around 20% at most markets with 6 markets over 40% and 7 under 20%.

Most markets determined their gross sales using an anonymous reporting form. The form has the date and an area to write in a dollar amount for agricultural products, prepared food, and craft sales. The form is either returned at the end of the market or at the following market.

Some markets ask local businesses to donate funds to help pay for entertainment at markets and two reporting markets stated they gave all or a portion of their operating profit to help other organizations in their community at the end of the market season.

Market (organizational) budgets varied as much as market size, although not in direct correlation. The biggest contributing factors toward a large budget were site fees and/or a paid manager. Last year, budgets ranged from approximately \$40,400 income with expenses of \$42,000 to \$250 income with \$125 expenses. This income comes primarily from vendors' fees. Most markets charge their vendors fees according to the amount of space used. This is calculated in different ways:

- Some markets charge a seasonal rate (from \$25 a season, to over \$800 a season) for “regular” vendors and a flat day rate charge (from \$5/week to \$20/week per space).
- Some markets charge by day rates only (from \$5/week to \$25/week).
- Eight reporting markets charge a percentage of vendors' daily sales. These percentages range from 3% to 6% a week.
- One market (which is paying for their permanent facility) charges both a seasonal rate and 3% of reported weekly gross sales
- Three quarters of the reporting markets charge a yearly membership fee ranging from \$15 to \$80.

For many market managers, the only compensation they receive is the gratitude of their fellow market vendors. Some are paid by the hour, some a fixed stipend, some are given “perks” by the market such as a free vending space if they vend themselves, free products, etc. Twenty reporting markets paid their manager/coordinator amounts ranging from \$600 to over \$13,000, with the funds coming primarily from vendors' space fees.

Farm to Family coupons, used by low income Vermonters at farmers' markets accounted for \$49,623 spent at the reporting markets (though state-wide 4,885 low income households, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used the coupons to buy \$121,992 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at Vermont farmers markets (*data obtained from the 2008 Economic Services Division VT Department for Children and Families report*).

Other expenses markets had were for entertainment (12 markets reported spending a total of \$19,167), advertizing (18 markets spent \$22,105), porta-potties (3 markets spent \$1,400), general liability insurance, site fees (14 markets spent \$22,674) and office supplies, bookkeeping, market coupons (as incentive for shoppers to attend their market: 3 markets spent \$1,203), website development, tents for manager and/or vendors though few markets shared how much they spent on these items.

Added Comments Managers Shared on Survey

Question: What do you see as your market's 3 greatest obstacles to more success?

- Parking issues (11)
- Problems with the market's site (6) including better visibility (4 more) and more space needed (4)
- Attract new (or more) vendors (9) including more meat, cheese, eggs, fruits, organic products
- More customers (10) including EBT use (1) and population of community (1)
- Vendors coming more consistently (6) and more vendor cooperation (2)
- Ability to pay coordinators (3)
- Need for better signage (2)

- Economically poor community base
- Fees (2)
- Economic downturn (2) Gas prices (1)
- Need for a manager that is not a vendor (2)
- Advertizing and marketing (4) (lack of)
- More public awareness (2)
- Provide (more) entertainment to draw customers (3), need funds for entertainment
- Better organization of market (2)
- Day and Time of market
- Lack of interest in fresh vegetables
- No facility for inclement weather
- Better website (1), more web advertizing (1)

Question: Would you or members of your board be interested in attending special workshops during the summer market season? Yes (6) Topics of interest are:

- Farmers' Market board members for a half day training session and (second) half day for input to the Vermont Farmers' Market Association
- Help with tracking sales
- Vendor recruitment and advertizing

Question: Would you or members of your board be interested in attending special workshops during the winter months? Yes (12) Topics of interest are:

- Help with creating and managing a market website
- Marketing advice and assistance (3)
- Time for vendor sharing

Managers also commented on:

- The need now to do a separate winter market brochure
- That small towns equals a small population equals not large vendor sales
- To buy local first is a new concept to many people and it requires a different outlook as to where one gets their necessities

Conclusion

Farmers' Markets in Vermont are all unique and each provides a service to their community. As the desire for more local food products grows, so does the number and size of markets. Small markets have different needs and face different obstacles than large markets. No matter what the size, in most communities where a farmers' market is present, townspeople are taking the time to visit them and purchase products from local producers as well as having the opportunity to catch up with their friends they see at the market.

The largest markets in the state generally have more capital to work with. Their vendors generally earn more money at the market so the board of directors are able to charge them more to attend which in turn allows the market greater access to better promotion, ability to pay a manager and other fees like bookkeeping and website development. Large markets often have a waiting list of people wanting to vend at their market. Most also have many years of experience,

growing from a small market to a large one and have learned much through trial and error. The responsibilities are left to the manager and there is little help supplied by the vendors. Small markets rarely have the funds to pay for more than bare necessities. Most are managed by volunteer help, which is provided by the vendors that sell at the market. Often they have a hard time keeping quality vendors who often leave if a better opportunity at a larger market presents itself.